



# Public Forum

## Protecting Your Health

### The Bureau of Health Professions

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#### **Generation Rx: Prescription Drug Abuse Among Youth**

Are prescription drugs harmful? The answer is both no...and yes. Taken under the supervision of a licensed medical professional, prescription drugs are powerful tools for the treatment of thousands of medical conditions. But caution should be used. Prescription drugs are quickly becoming the first choice for young people who are trying to get "high" without the stigma of illicit drugs. Prescription drugs taken out of the context of prescribed medical use is dangerous and can even be fatal. Each year, there are an increasing number of young people who are hospitalized or die from using others' medications.

Over the past decade, the use of illicit drugs like marijuana and crack cocaine among young people peaked and is now on the decline. This can be attributed to educational campaigns and other drug abuse prevention efforts. Unfortunately, young people are turning to prescription drugs at an increasing rate. If we are going to protect our young people and their future, we must develop ways to address this serious problem.

The Partnership for Drug-Free America found that nearly one in five teens (19 percent, or 4.5 million) report abusing prescription medication to get high. About one in 10 (10 percent or 2.4 million) report abusing cough medicine to get high. Many studies show that young people are abusing both



prescription drugs and over-the-counter medication to achieve an altered state similar to that of illicit drugs.

University of Michigan research confirms that teens are increasingly dependent on legal drugs to alter their consciousness. Many authors have named today's teens "Generation Rx," referring to their rampant abuse of prescription drugs.

We can all make a difference and change this trend. Simply talking to your kids about the benefit of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medication for real medical purposes, paired with the danger of abusing those drugs, is critical. Setting a positive example by properly using prescription medication is equally important. In addition, parents should store their drugs in a private, secure location to help prevent access to them by curious or drug-abusing teens.

Find unlikely or alternative storage places for your prescription medicine outside the bathroom medicine cabinet or kitchen counter, such as your purse, locked bedside table, or other private and secure places.

Prescription drugs are intended for one person. It is unlawful to share your prescriptions. Education about the dangers of these drugs and the potential consequences of substance abuse is equally critical. If you are a teacher, parent or youth leader, start the conversation, and help kids understand the seriousness of using prescription drugs, especially mixed with illicit drugs and alcohol. If you are a teen, talk to your friends about how serious

this issue is. And finally, if you are a teen or adult with drug abuse problems, get help from your doctor, counselor or local drug abuse treatment center.

#### **Michigan Automated Prescription System (MAPS)**

In 2003, the State of Michigan began collecting data on all controlled substance prescriptions dispensed at pharmacies as a result of legislation enacted in 2002. A popular practice is known as "doctor shopping". Patients visit several different physicians asking for the same drug. They don't tell the physicians that they received the same medication (usually a narcotic analgesic) from a different physician only days before. Some patients are addicted to the drugs. Others sell the medication. This sometimes results in deaths by overdose. Physicians and

#### **Inside This Issue**

- ♦ **Generation Rx:  
Prescription Drug Abuse  
Among Youth**
- ♦ **What Is a Controlled  
Substance?**
- ♦ **Caring for You Column:  
Identifying Dispensing  
Errors**
- ♦ **Question and Answer  
Corner "Is my provider  
licensed?"**
- ♦ **Michigan Automated  
Prescription System  
(MAPS)**

# Public Forum

pharmacists are allowed to query the database when they suspect a patient is "doctor shopping", as doctor shopping is illegal. The police can search this data when they are conducting a legitimate drug investigation, for example, finding prescription narcotics on a person during a traffic stop which appear to have been acquired illegally. The database is known as MAPS, the Michigan Automated Prescription System. Over 30 states have similar programs, and the federal government recently enacted a law requiring all states to operate similar programs.

With prescription drug monitoring programs such as MAPS, physicians can also identify patients who do not "doctor shop". This alleviates concerns the physician may have about a patient visiting several doctors. MAPS allows the physician to prescribe the appropriate medication, such as analgesics, to treat the patient adequately with a greater amount of information. All data in the system is protected, and only released to physicians and pharmacists who certify that they are treating the patient. They are not allowed to provide this information to anyone else. Currently, MAPS is receiving requests for over 400 patient reports daily, and has recently launched an Internet site where physicians and pharmacists can obtain data 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



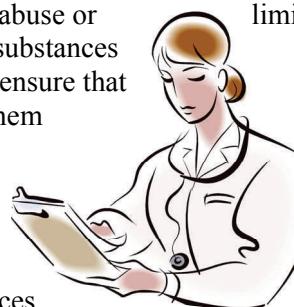
## What is a "Controlled Substance"?

*Controlled substance* is a term used for drugs that are regulated by federal and state agencies. Some common cough medicines are considered controlled substances, depending on the medical use and the potential for abuse or dependence. Controlled substances are closely monitored to ensure that professionals prescribe them appropriately and patients use them correctly.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice are the two federal agencies that help protect the public from the harmful effects of drugs. The Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 is the federal law regarding the manufacturing, importation, possession, and distribution of certain drugs. This legislation created five categories or "schedules" of drugs. Drugs in each category range from Schedule 5 (lowest potential for abuse) to Schedule 1 (highest potential for abuse). "Substance abuse" means the use of any substance for non-therapeutic purposes or use of medication for a purpose other than that for which it was prescribed. The term "Drug diversion" means the use or transfer of prescription drugs for recreational purposes.

Schedules for controlled substances are based on risk of abuse and acceptable medical use. The goal is to make available the drug or substance that is most appropriate for treating a condition. By controlling some

substances with greater regulation, the state and federal government can protect the public. The following is a summary of the five schedules:



Schedule 5 drugs are sometimes available without a prescription. A drug in this schedule has a relatively limited potential for physical or psychological dependence. An example would be cough syrups with small amounts of codeine.

Schedule 4 drugs have a low potential for abuse. These drugs have a relatively limited potential for physical or psychological dependence. Schedule 4 drugs can only be obtained with a prescription and may be refilled up to five times within a six-month period. Examples include Valium, Xanax, and Darvocet.

Schedule 3 drugs have a higher potential for abuse than the drugs in schedules 4 and 5. These drugs have relatively moderate to low potential for physical or physiological dependence or abuse. Schedule 3 drugs can only be obtained with a prescription and may be refilled up to five times in a six-month period. Examples include anabolic steroids and THC (the synthetic form of the psychoactive ingredient of marijuana used to treat nausea).

Schedule 2 drugs have a high potential for abuse. These drugs are prescribed with severe restrictions. Abuse or misuse of the drugs in this schedule may lead to severe psychological or physical dependence. Examples include Methadone, Amphetamine,

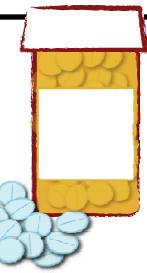
cocaine and Ritalin.

Schedule 1 drugs or substances have a high potential for abuse. These drugs are deemed to have no legitimate

medical purpose in the United States, even under medical supervision. Substances that fall under this category that may be familiar to the general public are LSD, Heroin and Ecstasy.

If you have questions about which schedule any medication falls under, ask

*Continued On Page 4*



## *Q&A*

## QUESTION & ANSWER

**Question:** Is there a way for me to find out if my health care provider is licensed and has a good record of practice?

**Answer:** Yes, if your health care provider is licensed by the State of Michigan you can verify their status on our website, [www.michigan.gov/healthlicense](http://www.michigan.gov/healthlicense). About halfway down is a link entitled “Verify a License.” Clicking on the link allows you to enter the first and last name, profession, and license number of the individual. If you do not know the license number, you can enter the last name and all the results for that name should appear.

This feature allows you to determine whether your health care provider is licensed by the state. You can also check the status of their license (i.e., whether it is active, lapsed, disciplined, etc.) by clicking on the individual’s license number. Not all health professions are licensed by the State of Michigan. For example, the State does not license pharmacy technicians, radiologists, or massage therapists.

If you would like more information, the state can provide some information through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This act entitles any individual access to public information about licensees. The State of Michigan cannot provide you with personal information, such as date of birth or Social Security numbers. Only public documents related to licensing and disciplinary actions are available through the Freedom of Information Act.

To request information on a particular licensee, a written request must be submitted to the FOIA section, Bureau of Health Professions. Staff will review your request and respond as allowed under the FOIA. State law requires that FOIA requests be processed in a timely manner. The Bureau of Health Professions charges 25 cents per page if the response exceeds 40 pages to cover the cost of processing your request.

Submit FOIA requests to:

Bureau of Health Professions

FOIA COORDINATOR

P.O. Box 30670

Lansing MI, 48909

Fax Number: (517) 241-1212

Include your name, address, and phone number, along with the name of the licensee and the profession they practice, (i.e. MD, DO, RN, etc.) when you submit your request. Be an informed consumer by taking a moment to verify the license status of your health care providers. If you do not have access to the Internet in your home, visit a public library and use the public computer. To get information by phone, contact our license verification unit at (517) 241-9427.

If you think that a care provider is practicing inappropriately, or has violated the law in some way, you can take action. To file an allegation, contact the Bureau of Health Professions at (517) 373-9196.

# Public Forum

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your doctor or pharmacist. Information can also be obtained by visiting the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency website, [www.usdoj.gov/dea](http://www.usdoj.gov/dea).



## Caring For You! Identifying Dispensing Errors

Have you taken a close look at the label on your prescription medication?

You should! Dispensing errors are common, preventable, and correctable. A dispensing error occurs when there is an error either with the medication or the label on a container. Dispensing errors are particularly important to identify and correct because of patient safety.

Simple mistakes reflect the neglect of details by the pharmacist. Errors that seem harmless such as the wrong doctor's name on the bottle or the wrong date could be harmful in some situations. Look at your bottle and

identify that the label accurately reflects the contents, and make sure personal information such as your name and the prescribing doctor's name are correct.

Pay attention to what your doctor says when he or she writes the prescription. Your doctor should tell you how often and when the medication should be taken. If the container label does not reflect the instructions from your doctor or the verbal instructions of your pharmacist, ask for clarification.

Accuracy is key to the health outcomes of pharmaceuticals. Especially dangerous for the health and safety of patients are incorrect labeling of dosage and an incorrect medication name. If you notice that your prescription has been incorrectly labeled, take steps to promote safer practice by the pharmacy. Point out the error to pharmacist or report it to the Bureau of Health Professions.

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Readers' comments are invited. Please e-mail comments and suggestions to the editor at: [dalyman@michigan.gov](mailto:dalyman@michigan.gov) or write to Public Forum Editor, Doreen Lyman BHP, P.O. Box 30670, Lansing, MI 48909.

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